

to give performances. Of the many Greybacked shrikes I have known, only one indulged in mimicry, and that too only on three evenings. But this bird displayed real taste in the call notes it chose to mimic. Within half an hour it gave excellent renderings of the notes of some fourteen different birds. Almost every bird which has an interesting call or song was included, e.g. the Common Hawk Cuckoo, the Red-wattled Lapwing, the Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher, the Indian Nightjar, the Plaintive Cuckoo and the Whitebreasted Kingfisher. Every time the Hawk Cuckoo's 'pipeeah' notes were uttered they were either preceded or succeeded by the 'teeti-teeti-teeti' preface which the Hawk Cuckoo itself very often does not utter. In the case of the Redwattled Lapwing, the 'Did you do it' call was invariably preceded by the 'trick . . . trick . . . trick'. When taking off the Whitebreasted Kingfisher, the shrike faithfully reproduced the first notes which sound like a stammerer's efforts to commence a sentence.

As no other avian mimic has such an astonishing repertoire, it is a pity that the shrikes do not give more frequent performances.

#### 7. A GREYBACKED SHRIKE USING LARDERING TACTICS TO TACKLE NEEM FRUITS.

In a thin teak jungle bordering on cultivated land and scrub, a pair of Greybacked Shrikes (*Lanius schach caniceps* Blyth, most probably) has been found every summer for the past seven years. This year, in the first week of June, they were found feeding two full-grown chicks which must have left the nest many days ago. On June 15, when I could no longer distinguish between adult and young, one of these birds was observed eating a ripe neem fruit in an interesting fashion.

The shrike picked up a fruit from the ground, hopped on to a thin, low bush and very dexterously, with a sudden downward sweep of the bill, impaled the fruit on a dry, upstanding twig. Then it peeled and ate the fruit bit by bit, slowly turning the fruit about. Now and then the fruit fell off and the bird had to jump down, retrieve it and refix it. Once it wasted a couple of minutes vainly trying to fix a fruit on a twig which was green and still had leaves on it. Every time the bird tried jabbing the fruit on the twig, the fruit fell off and had to be fetched from the ground. After a time, the bird hopped back to the first twig and succeeded in its very first attempt to get the fruit fixed satisfactorily.

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#### 19. FURTHER NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF THE NEPAL VALLEY

**Sitta himalayensis**: Whitetailed Nuthatch.

A nest found at 8,000 ft. on Phulchok ridge on February 25. It was about 5 ft. from the ground in a rhododendron tree. Both birds were carrying nesting material into the hole which was built up with white mud. On April 8 both parents were feeding young which appeared well feathered when I flashed a torch into the nest hole.

**Acanthoptila nipalensis**: Spiny Babbler.

Since reading Dr. Ripley's article in the December 1950 number of the *Journal* I think my previous record of this bird must have been a mistake<sup>1</sup>. It differs from the illustration in the *Journal* as follows. White of throat less pure white, more dirty or off-white. The bill is less slender. The iris is brown not white. Otherwise it looks much the same but the bird I saw was always solitary and could not have behaved less like a sociable *Garrulax*. I have not seen one this winter, but hope to get a specimen sometime to clear up the doubt.

**Actinodura nipalensis**: Hoary Bar-wing.

Common on the ridge leading up to Sheopuri 7,000-8,000 ft., also on Phulchok ridge at the same height. Has many low churring notes, also whistle 'tui whee-er' very like that of the Streaked Laughing Thrush with which I think I have confused it in the past.

**Siva cyanouoptera**: Bluewinged Siva.

Fairly common at Godavari, usually in flocks with babblers, yuhinas etc. Until my husband shot one I had failed to identify it in the field, and had been much puzzled over this small bird which appeared to have a grey head contrasting with rufous back and black and white wings. The blue of the head and wings cannot be easily seen. The crest also is not visible and the bird appears very long and thin with very flat head, a curious distinctive shape. I have only seen it in jungle quite low, 5,000-6,000 ft. but only in winter so presume it moves to higher levels for breeding.

**Leiothrix lutea**: Redbilled Leiothrix.

I heard the male singing for the first time on March 4, and during April a pair obviously had a nest in thick scrub at 5,500 ft. Both birds would scold us whenever we passed, though owing to the thickness of the jungle I failed to find the nest.

**Certhia discolor**: Sikkim Tree-creeper.

We shot 2 of these birds at Godavari during December and they proved to be of the above species. Not seen there after the beginning of February.

**Cyornis hyperythra**: Rufousbreasted Flycatcher.

A single male shot at 8,000 ft. on Sheopuri on April 22. It was so much on the ground that I had mistaken it in the distance for a chat of some kind.

**Niltava grandis**: Large Niltava.

A female shot in jungle above Godavari at 6,500 ft. on January 28. No others seen.

**Niltava sundara**: Rufousbellied Niltava.

A male spent a couple of months in our garden from January 15 till March 8. Very quiet and tame and always found in the same patch of bushes. In March it began to be more active and would

<sup>1</sup> But see note No. 12 (2), p. 661 by Dr. R. L. Fleming.—Eds.

chase other birds which entered its strip of territory. I never heard it utter a sound.

**Niltava macgrigoriae** : Small Niltava.

Fairly common from March onwards at Godavari. The males have a curious little grating song, uttered *sotto voce*, a sort of sub-song, but they seem to have no other. On April 1 I saw 2 males challenging one another. They were only about 2 feet apart with feathers fluffed and both uttering this curious song, a mere thread of sound. They keep their bills open while singing. So engrossed were they that I could get very close to them, though they are usually shy. I have not seen them anywhere else except this west valley of Godavari, not above 6,000 ft. A male shot March 11.

**Rhipidura albicollis** : Whitethroated Fantail Flycatcher.

Seen several times up the west valley at Godavari 5,500 ft. during January.

**Seicercus castaneiceps** : Chestnut-headed Flycatcher Warbler.

Seen fairly often at Godavari during January, February and early March in mixed flocks of babblers, willow-warblers etc.; occasionally in our garden. Not seen above 5,000 ft. One shot February 19.

**Abroscopus schisticeps** : Blackfaced Flycatcher Warbler.

Not common. A pair seen at 7,500 ft. on Sheopuri on New Year's day in a flock of tits. Seen occasionally at Godavari during February.

**Ploceus philippinus** : Baya Weaver Bird.

Nests found this year by K. Kilburne in pine trees in his garden. Is it not very unusual for these birds to build in pines?<sup>1</sup> Pine needles are also partly used in the construction of the nests.

**Hypacanthis spinoides** : Himalayan Greenfinch.

This year these have been very common all winter in the Valley and in the Embassy garden. They are still here in flocks (June 4th). In 1948-49 I hardly saw one.

**Aethopyga nipalensis** : Nepal Sunbird.

The common sunbird of the hills round the Valley, where it is abundant all winter. In summer not seen below 7,000 ft. In my previous notes I made a stupid mistake and noted Mrs. Gould's Sunbird as being common. The latter bird is in fact extremely rare here.

**Dicaem ignipectum** : Firebreasted Flowerpecker.

Very common this spring from February 25 onwards. The numbers seem to vary greatly in different years.

**Pitta nipalensis** : Bluenaped Pitta.

A female shot at Godavari, 5,600 ft. on January 28. This is the only one seen.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Konkan it sometimes builds in Casuarina trees (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), but this is decidedly uncommon.—Eps.

**Picus chlorolophus** : Small Yellownaped Woodpecker.

A male shot by a little boy with a catapult and presented to me on February 5 was the first one I had seen in the Valley. Have since seen it on Nagarjung uttering the most peculiar call, a trill of 5 or more ascending notes. If I had not seen it calling I should have thought the call to be made by some variety of cuckoo. Also utters a loud 'quaaa' at intervals. Has, moreover, a wide range of more woodpecker-like trills, and it also drums.

**Rhopodytes tristis** : Himalayan Greenbilled Malkoha.

March 20 and 29 in our garden, very tame, and uttering at intervals of 4 to 6 seconds a most peculiar croak.

**Caprimulgus indicus** : Jungle Nightjar.

Common on Nagarjung. First heard calling mid March, but nightjars are seen on this mountain all winter, and I think this species is resident.

**Falco peregrinus peregrinator** : Shahin Falcon.

Seen for the first time this summer. In our garden May 21; on the hills at 7,000 ft. on May 27. It is smaller and very much darker than the race which visits the Valley in winter. The bird seen flying on the hills was almost black with a very conspicuous cheek stripe.

**Falco severus** : Hobby.

Arrived in our garden this year on May 30, a day later than in 1948.

**Elanus coeruleus** : Blackwinged Kite.

Seen once only on June 1st in our garden.

**Sphenocercus sphenurus** : Wedgetailed Green Pigeon.

A single bird shot on Nagarjung at 6,000 ft. on April 21. I have often caught glimpses of green pigeons before without being sure of their identity. They are often heard whistling in the hills during April and May.

**Gennaeus leucomelanus** : Nepal Kalij Pheasant.

Common on Nagarjung, less so on the other hills. At the end of March they are evidently pairing, as the cocks collect in open places and challenge other cocks. They make the most extraordinary noises and appear to dance round in circles.

Unfortunately I have never been able to approach close enough to see the whole display. There are usually 3 or 4 cocks dancing and fighting and a half dozen or more hens. On June 4th on Nagarjung I saw a cock and two hens and about a dozen tiny chicks. Although very small, the chicks used their wings when following the parents downhill and appeared able to fly fairly well. I was surprised to see the cock with the hens and apparently helping with the chicks. The dark stripe down the chick's neck was very conspicuous.

KATMANDU, NEPAL  
June 4, 1951.

DESIRÉE PROUD